

# **Deer Creek**

## **Forest Plan Special Designations and Inventoried Roadless Area Report**

Prepared by:  
Dan Gilfillan  
North Zone Recreation Staff

For:  
Bonner Ferry Ranger District  
Idaho Panhandle National Forest

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## Introduction

The purpose of this analysis is to disclose potential effects to roadless and wilderness attributes and determine if, or to what extent it might affect future consideration for wilderness recommendations. This analysis focuses on the potential effects of project activities on wilderness characteristics as defined in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 (72.1). Professional judgment was incorporated in determining the project's potential effects. On the ground analysis was obtained by walk through surveys including assessments from known recreation resources (e.g. trails and viewpoints). Field surveys were conducted during the 2015 & 2016 field seasons by Bonners Ferry Ranger District Recreation Personnel (Pat Hart, Steve Petesch, and Bonners Trails Crews).

The project area boundary encompasses a portion of the Buckhorn Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area (#661). In total, this IRA consists of 28,700 acres with 6,700 acres occurring on the Idaho Panhandle NF in Idaho and 22,000 acres occurring on the Kootenai NF in Montana. *The roadless expanse considered for this project includes the smaller westernmost portion of the Buckhorn Ridge IRA to the west and is bounds by the nearest road to the East. The northernmost portion of the roadless expanse is the northernmost reaches of the Buckhorn Ridge IRA. Similarly, the southernmost bounds are the southernmost portions of the IRA. In total, the roadless expanse consists of 38,393 acres occurring on both the Idaho Panhandle NF in Idaho and the Kootenai NF in Montana.* Please refer to map listed below as figure 2.



**Figure 1 – Buckhorn Ridge IRA and associated roadless expanse**

Inventory criteria was utilized from FSH 1909.12 71.1 to determine if the unroaded lands contiguous to the roadless areas meets the inventory criteria. If the lands meet the inventory criteria then the bounds of analysis is the entire roadless area expanse, that is, the un-inventoried lands contiguous to roadless area, in addition to the roadless area. Inventoried roadless area characteristics found within the IRAs are directly related to the purpose and need (FSH.1909.15, 11.21) and issues (FSH 1909.15, 12.4) identified through scoping.



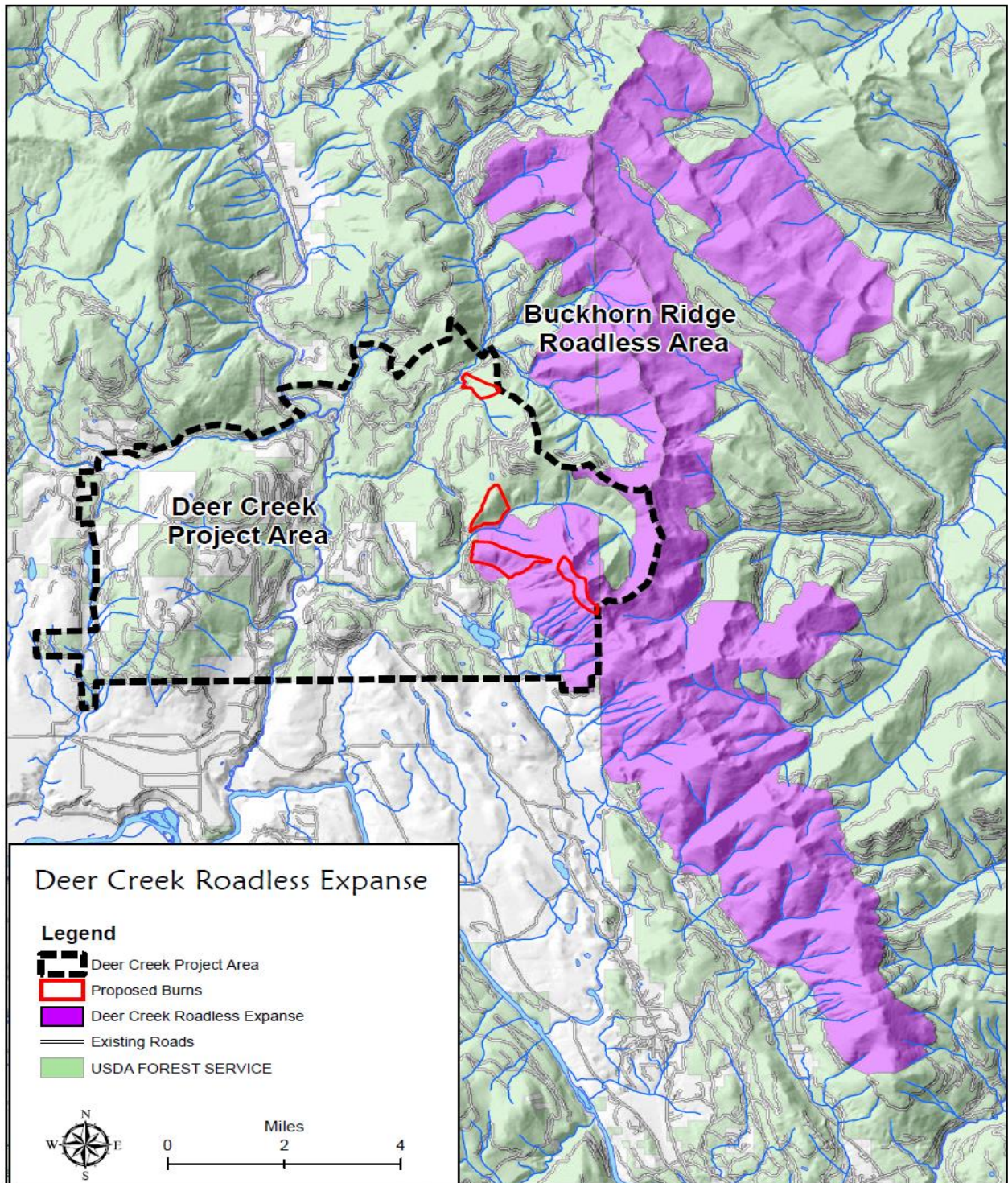


Figure 2 – Deer Creek Roadless Expanse

## Overview of Issues Addressed

Issues relevant to the Inventoried Roadless Area resources include:

1. Inventoried Roadless Area Characteristics
2. Wilderness Attributes

These issues were chosen as directed by National Policy and Forest Plan Direction. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires integrated use of the natural and social sciences in all planning and decision-making that affects the human environment. The human environment includes the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people to the environment (40 CFR 1508.14).

## Indicators Measures

Indicator measures are intended to address how each action individually (direct and indirect effects) and each alternative as the sum total of its proposed actions (cumulative effects) respond to the Forest Plan.

## Inventoried Roadless Area Characteristics

Actions must also comport with the Idaho Roadless Area Rule. Management classifications for Idaho Roadless Areas are expressed in a management continuum with the “Wild Land Recreation” category being the most restrictive and the “General Forest” category being the least restrictive.

Management classifications include:

1. Wild Land Recreation;
2. Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Significance;
3. Primitive;
4. Backcountry/Restoration; and
5. General Forest, Rangeland, and Grassland.

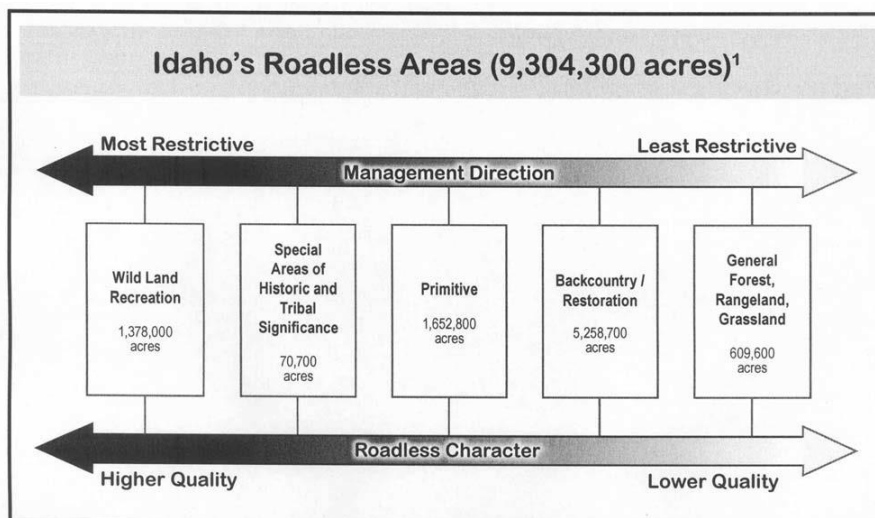


Figure 3 – Management Categories of Idaho Roadless Areas

Affects to the Idaho Roadless Areas are evaluated against the areas roadless values. The nine inventoried roadless area values used in analysis are:

1. High quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air.
2. Sources of public drinking water.
3. Diversity of plant and animal communities.
4. Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land.
5. Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation.
6. Reference landscapes.
7. Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality.
8. Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites.
9. Other locally identified unique characteristics.

### Wilderness Attributes

Wilderness attributes are described for each roadless area regardless of whether they are located within Idaho or outside of Idaho. Expected changes are presented for the action alternatives. Wilderness characteristics, as defined at FSH 1909.12 (72.1) and evaluated here include the following:

1. Natural – The extent to which long-term ecological processes are intact and operating.
2. Undeveloped – The degree to which the impacts documented in natural integrity are apparent to most visitors.
3. Outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation – Solitude is a personal, subjective value defined as the isolation from sights, sounds, and presence of others and from developments and evidence of humans. Primitive recreation is characterized by meeting nature on its own terms, without comfort and convenience of facilities.
4. Special features and values – Unique ecological, geographical, scenic, and historical features of an area.
5. Manageability – The ability to manage an area for wilderness consideration and maintain wilderness attributes.



## Affected Environment

### *Existing Condition*

#### *General*

Within the project area one Inventoried Roadless Area called Buckhorn Ridge (#661) exists. In total, this IRA consists of 28,700 acres with 6,700 acres occurring on the Idaho Panhandle NF in Idaho and 22,000 acres occurring on the Kootenai NF in Montana. The Buckhorn Ridge Roadless Area is located on the divide between the Moyie and Yaak Rivers, in the northwest corner of the Forest. The southern section is formed by Newton Ridge while the northern section is formed by the Spread Creek Road, which divides the area from the Northwest Peaks Roadless Area to the north. Access is available from several roads ending in trails off of the Yaak Road (No. 508), particularly Pine Creek, Fourth of July Creek, Meadow Creek, Hellroaring Creek, and Spread Creek.



**Figure 4 – Buckridge Ridge IRA & Associated Roadless Expanse**

The geography and topography are characterized by a high elevation ridgeline (6,500 feet elevation) with broad, open, grassy side slopes and timbered basins divided by spur ridges. The area includes headwater areas for Pine, Meadow, Hellroaring, Red Top and Spread Creeks of the Kootenai, and Deer Creek of the Idaho Panhandle. The area is surrounded by some developments, especially roads and clearcuts.

The ridgetop hiking experience is another of the area's attractions. The area presently receives recreation use in the form of hunting, cross country skiing, hiking, snowmobiling and nature photography. Approximately 600 recreation visitor day's annually are associated with the area.

### *Inventoried Roadless Area Character*

Only the Buckhorn Ridge Roadless Area exists within the project area



**Table 1. Roadless Area Name, Idaho Roadless Rule Classification, and Acres**

| <b>IRA Name &amp; #</b> | <b>Idaho Roadless Rule Management Classification(s)</b> | <b>Acres in Idaho</b> | <b>Proposed actions</b>            |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Buckhorn Ridge (#661)   | Backcountry/Restoration                                 | Approximately 6,700   | Approximately 423 Acres of Rx Burn |

### *Roadless Characteristics*

**High quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air:** Mean annual precipitation for the area varies between 65 and 80 inches, depending on elevation. Runoff varies between 45-65 inches, varying by elevation, with most of this amount appearing as streamflow in April-June. The water quality is rated high, even during the peak runoff periods.

**Sources of public drinking water:** This roadless area contains 3,100 acres of surface water (municipal water supply).

**Diversity of plant and animal communities:** Special features of the area include grizzly bears and associated subalpine habitats. The fish resource is supported by the headwaters of Hellroaring, Spread, North Fork Meadow, South Fork Meadow, and Red Top Creeks which are all tributaries to the Yaak River which supports rainbow, cutthroat, and brook trout. Pine Creek, a brook trout stream, has numerous tributaries within the area boundary. No threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species are known to occur.

**Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land:** The area contains grizzly habitat, mule deer and elk summer range, and some moose habitat. The area around Newton Ridge contains winter range. Region 1 sensitive species including the flammulated owl, Columbia spotted frog, Coeur d'Alene salamander, and western toad have habitat that overlaps this roadless area. Hidden Lake, a cutthroat fishery, is also in this roadless area. Bull trout habitat also overlaps this roadless area.

**Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation:** Opportunities for solitude vary throughout the area. There are many places along the trails and within the ridgetop meadows where roads and clearcuts are highly visible just outside the area boundary. These developed areas receive very little use however, so the loss of solitude is primarily just the visual impacts themselves. Most of the side draws and upper spruce basins remaining in the area are well-timbered, producing good solitude. Sounds along the Deer Creek road on the Idaho Panhandle side can be heard from the ridgetops. As one of the longer stretches of open grassy ridges on the forests, the Buckhorn Ridge Roadless Area provides many opportunities for primitive recreation. It now receives use from archery and rifle hunters, hikers, skiers, snowmobiles, and photographers. The most unique challenge, Buckhorn Ridge, offers is its relatively great length in terms of hiking or skiing, hunting big game animals including bear, is also considered a challenge by many.

**Reference landscapes:** The area has had moderate fire occurrences. The fuels situation is predominately dense conifer with downed woody materials as ground fuels on the lower slopes

and light ground fuels on the upper slopes and barren ridges. Except for some patches of mature lodgepole in the upper reaches of Meadow Creek and Red Top Creek, the insect and disease situation is stable with no significant activity presently occurring.

**Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality:** There are many miles of recreation trails within the Kootenai portion of the area which constitutes the only significant manmade feature affecting the natural integrity and appearance. On the Idaho Panhandle side, however, signs of past fire and subsequent grazing and salvage harvest are visible. Numerous mining remains, tailings, adits, and cabins are also present.

**Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites:** Cultural resource potential for prehistoric sites is considered low, based on surveys done in similar areas. Known historic sites include former lookouts, Forest Service work campsites, guard station on Pine Creek, and mining adits. There is some historical evidence of old lookout stations on Newton and Red Top Mountains.

**Other locally identified unique characteristics:** The Buckhorn Ridge Roadless Area has a long boundary relative to its size, due to a long serpentine configuration. The manageability of its boundary is, therefore, less than ideal, although for the most part, the boundary consists of clearcuts and road edges which are identifiable and recognizable on the ground. There is little that could be done to improve this boundary that would not also appreciably affect the size of the roadless area.

When considering how the proposed action would affect the wilderness characteristics of the IRA the roadless area characteristics would have similar effects to corresponding wilderness attributes. For the purposes of this report effects to roadless area characteristics will correspond to the wilderness attributes as listed in table 2.

**Table 2. Roadless Area Characteristics and Corresponding Wilderness Attributes**

| Wilderness Attributes  | Roadless Area Characteristics   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Natural:</b> Ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization and generally appear to have been affected primarily by forces of nature.</p> <p><b>Undeveloped:</b> Degree to which the area is without permanent improvements or human habitation.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High quality or undisturbed soil, water and air</li> <li>• Sources of public drinking water</li> <li>• Diversity of plant and animal communities</li> <li>• Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed candidate and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land</li> <li>• Reference landscapes</li> <li>• Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:</b></p> <p><b>Solitude:</b> opportunity to experience isolation from the sights sounds, and presence of other forms of the developments and evidence of humans.</p> <p><b>Primitive and unconfined recreation:</b> opportunity to experience isolation from the</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation.</li> </ul>   |

| Wilderness Attributes  | Roadless Area Characteristics   |
|--|---|
| evidence of humans, to feel a part of nature, to have a vastness of scale, and a degree of challenge and risk while using outdoor skills.  |   |
| <b>Special Features and Values:</b> Capability of the area to provide other values such as those with geologic, scientific, education, scenic, historic, or cultural significance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites</li> <li>Other locally identified unique characteristics</li> </ul> |
| Manageability: The ability of the Forest Service to manage an area to meet size criteria and the elements of wilderness.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Criteria</li> </ul>   |

## Desired Condition

### Land and Resource Management Plan

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) established Forest-wide multiple use goals, objectives, and management area requirements as well as management area prescriptions... The analysis of roadless lands, documented in Appendix C of the FEIS for the Plan, described each roadless area, the resources and values considered, the range of alternative land uses studied, and the effects of management under each alternative. As a result to the analysis some roadless areas were recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and others were assigned various non-wilderness prescriptions. The Buckhorn Ridge roadless area was assigned to Management Areas (MA) MA5—Backcountry, which is relatively large areas, generally without roads. The proposed action would occur within MA5 Backcountry & MA6 General Forest.

The forest plan did not make an “irreversible and irretrievable” commitment of resources to develop. The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate the environmental consequences of the proposed action and alternatives on the wilderness characteristics in the roadless area expanse.

- ♦ **FW-STD-IRA-01.** Within inventoried roadless areas, outside of the state of Idaho, the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart B, published at 66 Fed Reg. 3244-3273) shall apply. IRAs are identified in a set of inventoried roadless area maps, contained in the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation, Volume 2, dated November 2000, which are held at the national headquarters office of the Forest Service, or any subsequent update or revisions of those maps (36 CFR 294.11). Maps of the IRAs are also found in appendix C of the Forest Plan FEIS.
- ♦ **FW-STD-IRA-02.** Within inventoried roadless areas in the state of Idaho, Idaho Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart C) shall apply. Idaho Roadless Areas are identified in a set of maps maintained at the national headquarters office of the Forest Service.
- ♦ **FW-STD-IRA-03.** Within inventoried roadless areas in the state of Idaho, provisions in the Idaho Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart C) shall take precedence over any inconsistent land management plan component unless and until the rule is amended. Land management plan components that are not inconsistent with the Rule will continue to

provide guidance for projects and activities within Idaho Roadless Areas; as shall those related to protection of threatened and endangered species (36 CFR 294.28(d)).

- ♦ **FW-GDL-IRA-01.** Wilderness potential will be maintained on 16 percent of the inventoried roadless areas on the Forest.

## Management Area

### MA5—Backcountry

Approximately 92 percent of this MA is within inventoried roadless areas. This MA is relatively large areas, generally without roads, and provides a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. Trails are the primary improvements constructed and maintained for recreation users. In some areas, lookouts, cabins, or other structures are present as well as some evidence of management activities. Most lands within this MA occur within Idaho Roadless Areas classified as backcountry/restoration. If within an inventoried roadless area, management requirements under 36 CFR 294 Subpart C (inside Idaho) or Subpart B, 66 Fed Reg. 3244-3273 (outside of Idaho) apply.

### MA-6 –General Forest

Most of this MA consist of relatively large areas with roads trails, and structures, as well as sign of past and ongoing activities designed to actively manage the forest vegetation. This MA provides a wide variety of recreation opportunities, both motorized and non-motorized. The density of motorized routes in this MA is higher than most of the other MAs. Constructed improvements in the MA generally consist of campground, picnic or day use areas, trails, lookouts, and cabins. Most of the WUI on the Forest occurs within MA6 and activities designed to reduce hazardous fuels are common.

## Special Area Designations – Inventoried Roadless Areas

Inventoried Roadless Areas are a group of United States Forest Service lands that have been identified by government reviews as lands without existing roads that could be suitable for roadless area conservation as wilderness or other non-standard protections.

## Federal Law

### *The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) (78 Stat. 890) (September 3, 1964):*

The Wilderness Act states Congressional policy, establishes a National Wilderness Preservation System, defines wilderness, provides administrative and management direction, prohibits certain uses and activities, and establishes a process for adding wild lands to the NWPS. This act also lists the original areas included in the NWPS, and it provides a study and evaluation process for additional areas.

*Multiple Use, Sustained Yield Act. June 12, 1960. (74 Stat. 215, as amended: 16 U.S.C. 528-531):* Sec. 1 “It is the policy of the Congress that the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.”

Sec. 2 “The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized and directed to develop and administer the renewable surface resources of the national forests of the national forests for multiple use and sustained yield of the several products and services obtained there from.” “The establishment and maintenance of areas of wilderness are consistent with the purposes and provisions of this Act.”

*Forest Service Manual 2320 – Wilderness Management:*

FSM 2320 directs the Forest Service in managing wilderness. The Wilderness Act is the overriding legislative direction, and FSM 2320 provides more detailed administrative guidance for compliance with the Wilderness Act and Forest Service policy.

*Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-237) (February 24, 1978):*

By passing the Endangered Wilderness Act, Congress further established that areas previously modified or influenced by man should not be precluded from wilderness designation, nor should roadless areas near major cities since they provide primitive recreation opportunities close to population concentrations. The Congressional Record for this law endorsed the Forest Service plan to conduct a RARE II evaluation.

*The 2001 Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294, subpart B [2004]; 66 Fed. Reg. 3244 [Jan. 12, 2001]):*

The purpose of the 2001 Roadless Rule was to ensure that inventoried roadless areas sustain their values for this generation and for future generations. By sustaining these values, a continuous flow of benefits associated with healthy watersheds and ecosystems was expected.

Timber cutting activities and road construction/reconstruction were identified as having the greatest likelihood of altering and fragmenting landscapes, and the greatest likelihood of resulting in an immediate, long-term loss of roadless area values and characteristics; therefore, these activities were prohibited, with certain exceptions in each roadless area. The rule allows for road construction or reconstruction in the case of reserved or outstanding rights, or as provided for by statute or treaty. This would include roads associated with locatable mineral activities pursuant to the General Mining Law of 1872.

*Idaho Roadless Area Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart C):*

Developed through a collaborative process that included conservation groups Idaho Conservation League and Trout Unlimited, along with county commissioners, timber companies, hunters and recreation groups. Instead of blanket restrictions on the use of all IRAs, as provided by the national Roadless Rule, the Idaho Rule creates several different categories of lands within Idaho's 9.3 million acres of IRAs and applies different management "themes" to each category. Under three of the themes covering over 3 million acres, the Idaho Rule provides more protection than the national Roadless Rule, banning all road-building, with a single exception for roads required by "statute, treaty, reserved or outstanding rights, or other legal duty of the United States." Unlike the national rule, however, the Idaho Rule does permit some temporary road-building and logging in lands covered by the "Backcountry/Restoration" (BCR) theme, while providing certain restrictions to ensure that the roadless characteristics of the lands are maintained or improved over the long term.

## Executive Orders

*Secretary's Memorandum 1042-154:*

On May 29, 2009 the Secretary of Agriculture ordered that the Secretary of Agriculture holds the decision-making authority "over the construction and reconstruction of roads and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in inventoried roadless areas."



***Secretary's Memorandum 1042-155:***

On June 18, 2010 the Secretary of Agriculture renewed his reservation of final decision authority over certain forest management and road construction projects in inventoried roadless areas. This memorandum states that, "Advance communication and coordination with this office on all activities associated with projects in inventoried roadless areas is essential and should continue as currently conducted.

***Secretary's Memorandum 1042-156:***

On May 30, 2011 the Secretary of Agriculture reserved to the Secretary the decision making authority over the construction and reconstruction of roads and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in inventoried roadless areas on certain lands administered by the Forest Service.

***Secretary's Memorandum:***

On March 2, 2012, the Secretary of Agriculture issued a final memo requiring review and approval of certain activities in Roadless Areas. "Except as noted, the Chief will review all projects involving road construction or reconstruction and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in those areas identified in the set of inventoried roadless area maps contained in the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation, Final Environmental Impact Statement Volume 2 dated November 2000." It further stated that "This process does not apply to lands subject to 36 CFR 294, Subpart C (Idaho Roadless Rule) and 36 CFR XXX, Subpart X (Colorado Roadless Rule)."

**Other Guidance or Recommendations**

***Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70 – NFS lands that qualify as an IRA:***

Criteria for determining whether an area of NFS land qualifies as an IRA are provided in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70, which states: "Areas qualify for placement on the potential wilderness inventory if they meet the statutory definition of wilderness. Include areas that meet either criteria 1 and 3, or criteria 2 and 3 below."

1. Areas contain 5,00 acres or more;
2. Areas contain less than 5,000 acres, but can meet one or more of the following criteria:
  - a. Areas can be preserved due to physical terrain and natural conditions;
  - b. Areas are self-contained ecosystems, such as an island, that can be effectively managed as a separate unit of National Wilderness Preservation System; and
  - c. Areas are contiguous to existing wilderness, primitive areas administration-endorsed wilderness, or potential wilderness in other federal ownership, regardless of their size.
3. Areas do not contain forest roads (36 CFR 212.1) or other permanently authorized roads, except as permitted in areas east of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian (sec. 7112).

Potential wilderness areas may qualify for the inventory even though they include the following types of areas or features:

10. Timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not evident, except as provided in Section 71.12 for areas east of the 100th meridian. Examples include those

areas containing early logging activities related to historic settlement of the vicinity, areas where stumps and skid trails or roads are substantially unrecognizable, or areas where clear-cuts have regenerated to the degree that canopy closure is similar to surrounding uncut areas.

*Forest Service Manual 2320 – Wilderness Management:*

FSM 2320 directs the Forest Service in managing wilderness. The Wilderness Act is the overriding legislative direction, and FSM 2320 provides more detailed administrative guidance for compliance with the Wilderness Act and Forest Service policy.

## Environmental Consequences

### *Methodology*

Roadless areas are evaluated using five wilderness attributes that correspond to the roadless characteristics defined in 36 CFR 294 – Roadless Area Conservation, Applicable to the National Forests in Idaho, Final Rule, referred to as the Idaho Roadless Rule. Project activities are first evaluated to determine if there will be an effect. The effects are then evaluated to determine if they will improve, be stable, or degrade the attributes and characteristics.

Based on court history, projects on lands contiguous to roadless areas must analyze the environmental consequences, including irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources on roadless area attributes, and the effects for potential designation as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964. This analysis must consider the effects to the entire roadless expanse – that is both the roadless area and the unroaded lands contiguous to the roadless area.

Actions proposed by the USDA Forest Service identified in the alternatives are evaluated in relation to their effects on each roadless area. The analysis discloses potential effects to the roadless character & wilderness attributes in order to determine if, or to what extent these effects might influence future consideration for wilderness recommendations. This analysis focuses on the potential effects on roadless characteristics as defined in the Idaho Roadless Rule and wilderness attributes as defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 (72.1).

(Table 2) shows the crosswalk or relationship between the wilderness attributes identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 and the roadless area characteristics defined in the Idaho Roadless Rule. The wilderness attributes and associated roadless characteristics are used to compare the effects of the proposed changes in designations.

Wilderness attributes are described for each roadless area. Expected changes are presented for the action alternatives. The five wilderness attributes include: (1) Natural, (2) Undeveloped, (3) Solitude and Primitive Recreation, (4) Special Features, and (5) Manageability/boundaries (FSH 1909.12 Ch. 72.1, REC-9).

The best available science used in the determination of the effects of reintroduction of prescribed fire into the Buckhorn Ridge IRA was partially gleaned from the USDA Forest Service publication entitled, “An Ecologically Based Strategy for Fire and Fuels Management in National Forest Roadless Areas” written by Dominick A. DellaSala and Evan Frost. In which, a case for prescribed Fire in Roadless Areas is compiled from over ninety separate publications. Please refer to [http://www.fusee.org/resources/Documents/fire\\_mgmt\\_roadless.pdf](http://www.fusee.org/resources/Documents/fire_mgmt_roadless.pdf).

## Alternative 1 – No Action

### Direct and Indirect Effects

#### *Inventoried Roadless Area Characteristics*

##### **Buckhorn Ridge (#661) - Backcountry/Restoration & associated roadless expanse**

**Soil, water and air resources:** As a direct effect, the no action alternative should support the soil, water and air resources. However, indirectly (under the no action alt.) we could see greater impacts to the area due to an increased likelihood of severe wildfires due to prior fire suppression efforts.

**Diversity of plant and animal communities:** The no action alternative should have no effect on the diversity of plant and animal communities. More technical analysis can be found in the sensitive plant species specialist and wildlife reports.

**Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land:** The no action alternative should have no adverse effects on the habitat for T&E, proposed candidate, and sensitive plant and animal species. More specific analysis can be found in the wildlife and botany specialist reports.

**Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation:** The no action alternative should have no direct effect on opportunities for primitive and semi-primitive recreation. Indirectly though, by taking no action the likelihood of a stand replacing type fire may be greater. If a large scale high intensity wildfire were to occur in the Buckhorn IRA and surrounding roadless expanse the loss of remote and undeveloped recreational opportunities may occur for a longer period of time due to unsafe post fire trail conditions and prolonged closures needed for the public safety.

**Reference landscapes:** The no action alternative would have no adverse impact on the area as a reference landscape.

**Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality:** If the no action alternative is selected there should be no immediate effect to the scenery resources of the project area. In the event of a wildfire, the impacts to the overall landscape character should be greater under the no action alternative because of an increased likelihood of a high severity fire.

**Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites:** If the No Action Alternative is selected there should be no immediate effect to cultural resources of the project area. A more detailed analysis can be found in the heritage specialist report.

**Other locally identified unique characteristics:** No other locally identified unique characteristics were identified by the Interdisciplinary team or the public.

#### *Wilderness Attributes*

##### **Buckhorn Ridge (#661) - Backcountry/Restoration & associated roadless expanse**

## Natural

As a direct effect, the no action alternatives would support the Natural attributes of the IRA and surrounding roadless expanse. Annual fire occurrence in the project area is low however; northern Idaho ecosystems are naturally subject to periodic large fires. Natural processes including insect and disease activity, would continue to occur. Vegetation structure would change over time through natural growth, death, and events such as wildfires, and storms. Insect outbreaks would continue. This causes an accumulation of fine fuels then once dead trees falls, they contribute to large, woody debris that may persist for several decades. This increased fuel load supports high-intensity fires during period of extreme fire weather, leading to more severe fire effects. For additional information on public drinking water, diversity of plant and animal communities and habitat for T&E, proposed candidate, and sensitive plant and animal species please see the respective resource specialist reports.

## Undeveloped

The undeveloped character of the area should not change under the no action alternatives. The no action alternatives would have no adverse impacts on the area as a reference landscape. If one of the no action alternatives are selected there should be no immediate effect to the scenery resources. In the event of a wildfire, the visual impacts to the overall landscape character could be greater under the no action alternative because of an increased likelihood of a high severity fire. Indirectly, required fire suppression tactics (dozer line, aerial application of fire retardants, hand line) could potential have greater adverse effects on the, “Undeveloped” attributes of the Buckhorn Ridge IRA (and associated roadless expanse) if a large scale fire event were to occur. Please see the fuels specialists report for a more detailed description of the potential effect of the fire resource.

## Primitive and unconfined Recreation

The no action alternatives should have no direct effect on opportunities for primitive and semi-primitive recreation. Indirectly though, by taking no action the likelihood of a stand replacing type fire may be greater. If a large scale high intensity wildfire fire were to occur in the IRA (and associated roadless expanse), the loss of remote and undeveloped recreational opportunities may occur for a longer period of time due to unsafe post fire trail conditions and prolonged closures required for the public safety.

## Special Features

The No Action alternatives would have no effect on Special Features.

## Manageability

The No Action alternatives would have no effect on Manageability.

| Resource Element         | Resource Indicator                | Measure<br>Improving, Stable or<br>Degrading) | Key Issue |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Wilderness<br>Attributes | Natural                           | Stable  | Yes       |
|                          | Undeveloped                       | Stable  | Yes       |
|                          | Solitude and Primitive Recreation | Stable  | Yes       |
|                          | Special Features                  | Stable  | No        |

|  |                               |        |           |
|--|-------------------------------|--------|-----------|
|  | Manageability (as Wilderness) | Stable | No        |
| <b>Will the alternative affect the areas suitability for wilderness designation?</b> |                               |        | <b>No</b> |

**Table 1 - Resource indicators and measures for alternative 1 (IRAs and Roadless Expanse)**

## Cumulative Effects

Within the Deer Creek Project area, there are activities that are past, present, and/or reasonably foreseeable that have, or could, affect recommended wilderness and inventoried roadless resources. Within the project file, there is a comprehensive list of those specific activities. For the purposes of this analysis, focus was given to only those activities with potential affects (table 3).

**Table 3. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions on NFS (Alt. 1)**

| <b>Actions on National Forest Lands</b>   | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably Foreseeable</b> |
|---|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Prescribed burns:</b> Based on past experience, we expect prescribed burning to taking place now and in the future, on both the Idaho and Montana sides of the IRA.  | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Tree planting</b> Its expected that future tree planting on forest service lands will occur in the future  | X           | X              |                               |
| <b>Timber stand improvement</b> activities: Stand improvement activities are actions such as pre-commercial thinning of young tree plantations and pruning of white pine trees to reduce blister rust mortality. These activities have occurred in the past, are currently being proposed and are expected to continue in the future.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Wildfires:</b> Wildfires will continue to ignite within and adjacent to the project area. Thunderstorms can be expected to occur across the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. A majority of documented ignitions since the 1940's are lightning caused within the project area. A total of 1,891 acres have burned from wildfires within the project area since 1988 and 46,183 acres since 1889. | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Fire suppression:</b> Fire suppression will continue because the project area is within the wildland-urban Interface, and is a continuation of current management.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Trail maintenance:</b> Clearing limits and drainage work completed annually.   | X           | X              | X                             |

**Table 4. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions on Adjacent Lands (Alt. 1)**

| <b>Actions on Adjacent Ownerships</b>  | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably Foreseeable</b> |
|--|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Prescribed burning:</b> Based on past experience, we expect prescribed burning is taking place now and in the future, on both the Idaho and Montana sides of the IRA.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Tree Planting:</b> Its expected that future tree planting on adjacent lands will occur in the future  | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Timber stand improvement activities:</b> Based on current practices, it is reasonable to assume there has been and will be pre-commercial thinning on industrial and other privately held forestland.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Wildfires</b> will continue to ignite within and adjacent to the project area. Thunderstorms can be expected to occur across the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. A majority of documented ignitions since the 1940's are lightning caused within the project area. The timing, size, | X           | X              | X                             |



| <b>Actions on Adjacent Ownerships</b>  | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably<br/>Foreseeable</b> |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| intensity and resource impacts from future wildfires cannot be predicted.  |             |                |                                   |
| <b>Fire suppression</b> will continue because Idaho Code states that fire is a nuisance and must be suppressed, and this is the direction for adjacent land fire protection. | X           | X              | X                                 |

The no action alternative should have no cumulative effects related to past, present and foreseeable actions in the Buckhorn Ridge IRA.

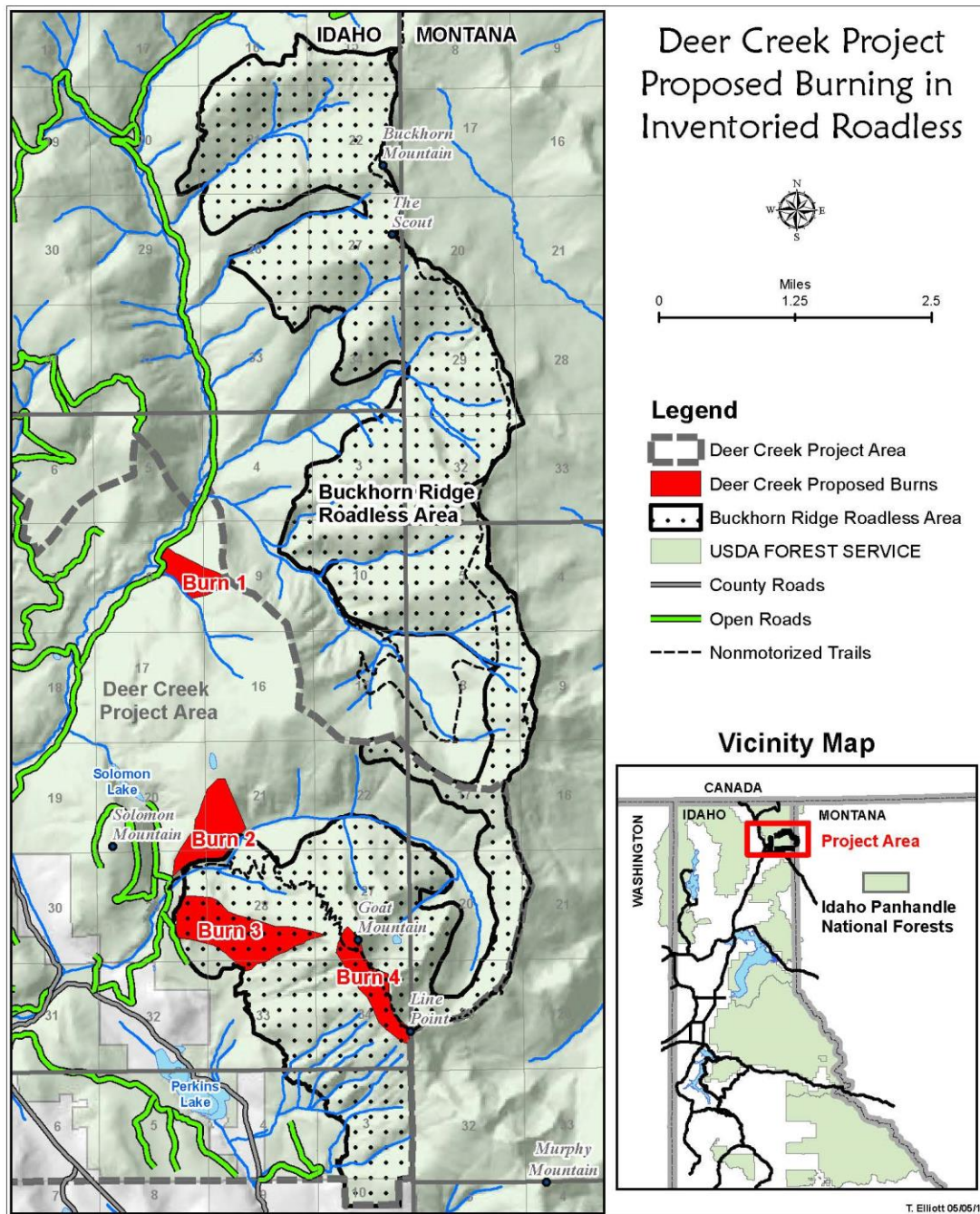
### **Summary of Effects**

*Within the Buckhorn Ridge (#661) IRA, the no action alternative would have no direct effect on the individual inventoried roadless area characteristics or Wilderness Attributes. Indirectly however, if the no action alternative is selected and prescribed burning does not take place, within the IRA (and associated roadless expanse) several of the areas characteristic could see a greater impacts from wildfires.*

## Alternative 2, 3 & 4 – All Action Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Effects

### *Inventoried Roadless Area Characteristics – Buckhorn Ridge IRA*



**Figure 4. RX Burn Units with the Buckhorn Ridge IRA**

### **Buckhorn Ridge IRA (#661) - Backcountry/Restoration & Associated Roadless Expanse**

**Project Description:** The Deer Creek Project is a large scale, multi-resource, integrated forest restoration project being planned on the Bonners Ferry Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. The current project proposal includes prescribed burning activities and non-motorized trail reconstruction/maintenance within the Buckhorn Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) #661. No actions are being proposed in the surrounding roadless expanse. The Idaho Roadless Rule applies to the 6,700 acres of the IRA located in Idaho.

Prescribed burning is being planned for four units within the IRA as displayed in Figure 2. This treatment is intended to restore fire as an ecological process which will serve to reduce wildfire hazards and improve forage opportunities for big game in the upper Skin Creek and Curley Creek watersheds. The proposed use of prescribed fire will also facilitate whitebark pine restoration on the western flank of Goat Mountain. Project activities may include the point protection of some whitebark pine trees as well as the interseeding and/or interplanting of whitebark pine.

Ten miles of trail reconstruction of a non-motorized trail is also proposed in the IRA. This work would include brushing, clearing, and repair of the existing tread on the Goat Mountain Trail (#44) from Road #627 to the junction of Keno Trail #42.

**Soil, water and air resources:** The proposed prescribe burning activities should reduce the likelihood of a stand replacing fire and the associated impacts to the soil and water resources found in the IRA. Impacts to the adjacent roadless expanse would include a similarly reduced potential for a large scale fire, only to a much smaller degree.

**Diversity of plant and animal communities:** The proposed activities should have a positive (improving) effect on the roadless characteristic associated with the diversity of plant and animal communities. It should directly improve the whitebark pine (USFS, Region 1 Sensitive Plant Species) communities and lower the risk of a stand replacing wildfire within the IRA. Please review the botany & wildlife specialist report for more information. Within the roadless expanse no additional restoration activities are proposed through this project and as the result no additional beneficial results are expected to the diversity of plant and animal communities found in the surrounding unroaded areas.

**Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land:** The prescribed burn units should improve browse and forage habitat for grizzlies, deer, elk and moose. Burn units would reduce conifer encroachment in existing shrubfields revitalizing decadent brush (reducing shrub height and stimulating new growth). Prescribed burning activities would also improve the quality and quantity of grass and herbaceous forage and potentially increasing long-term berry production (particularly huckleberry and mountain ash) in summer and fall. Reduction of overstory cover would allow more sunlight to penetrate and rejuvenation decadent shrubs. Please refer to the wildlife section of this report for more information. It should also directly benefit the whitebark pine (USFS, Region 1 Sensitive Plant Species) communities by lower the risk of a stand replacing wildfire. Please review the botany report for additional information. No measurable impacts (beneficial or detrimental) are expected to occur with the adjacent roadless expanse.

**Primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation:** The proposed management activities could have a short term negative affect on the

semi-primitive recreational opportunities in the IRA. Impacts to the backcountry recreation opportunities found in areas where management activities occur could include the sights and sounds of helicopter use, a displacement of recreational traffic to areas not affected by fire activities, the sights and sounds of chainsaw use and the temporary closure of trails (Montana Line Trail #44) found within the IRAs during burning activities. Impact to the surrounding roadless expanse could include a slight increase in recreational traffic, potential concern created by the distant smoke originating from the proposed burn units and the sights and sounds of far-off helicopter use.

These short term impacts may be outweighed by the long term benefits associated with a reduced risk of catastrophic stand replacing fire caused by excessive fuel loading due to past suppression activities. If a large scale high intensity wildfire were to occur in the Buckhorn IRA the loss of backcountry and semi-primitive recreational opportunities may occur for a longer period of time due to unsafe post fire trail conditions and prolonged closures needed for the public safety.

Incidental tree cutting may take place in stands containing whitebark pine prior to the proposed prescribed burning to provide protection for these desirable trees. Snags and hazard trees may be cut if they are determined to be a safety concern. These activities would occur in areas at high elevations (>5,000') in rough terrain with no road access. Cut trees would be left on site. Cutting trees is permissible in Idaho Roadless Areas designated as Backcountry/Restoration where it is incidental to the implementation of a management activity not otherwise prohibited by subpart 294.24(c)(vii).

The proposed trail work on the Goat Mountain Trail (#44) would include brushing, clearing, and repair of the existing tread. This element of the proposed action would have a direct benefit to the recreational access into the Buckhorn Ridge IRA. No road construction or reconstruction would take place within the IRA. The

**Reference landscapes:** The proposed activities would do very little to detract from the IRAs ability to serve as a barometer from which one could measure the effect of development in other more intense managed landscapes. Similarly, the adjacent unroaded expanse would continue to serve as a relatively undisturbed reference landscape.

**Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality:** Currently, signs of past fire and subsequent grazing and salvage harvest are visible. The proposed prescribed burn units would be consistent with the existing scenic integrity. The reintroduction of natural appearing low intensity wildfire scars on the landscape would blend with the existing reference landscape. No change would occur to the scenic quality of the adjacent roadless expanse. Please refer to the Scenery section of this document.

**Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites:** The action alternatives should have no adverse impact on the areas traditional cultural properties and sacred sites. Likewise, no impacts are expected to occur within the roadless expanse. Please see the heritage section of this document for a more detailed analysis.

**Other locally identified unique characteristics:** The action alternative should have no adverse impact on other locally identified unique characteristics. Similarly, no adverse impacts are expected within the adjacent roadless expanse.

## *Wilderness Attributes*

### **Buckhorn Ridge (#661) - Backcountry/Restoration & associated roadless expanse**

#### **Natural**

Reintroduction of fire to an ecosystem where fire suppression activities have reduced the frequency of natural ignitions would have positive affects to the Natural quality the IRA restoring the ecosystem to a more natural process. Use of prescribed fire has proven successful in the restoration of wildland fire regimes. Continued entry to maintain fuel breaks could result in longer term impacts. Fuels treatment could also result in a short term negative impact to air quality as described in the fuels report. Please see the fuels specialists report for a more detailed description of the potential effect of the fire resource.

Positive impacts include the restoration of the whitebark pine (USFS, Region 1 Sensitive Plant Species) communities which enhances the Natural quality of the IRA. The need for the whitebark pine restoration is directly linked to the human-induced changes associated with the human introduction of the invasive blister rust fungus. A portion of one of the only known reproducing whitebark pine population in the Purcell Mountains occurs below the ridgeline of Goat Mountain. Opportunities exist to improve whitebark Pine reproduction in this area (through genetically superior tree selection, cone collection, seedling grow-out, site preparation, and interplanting/interseeding). Enhance health, vigor, and potential expansion of the existing population (through efforts to remove encroaching conifer competition). Please see the botany report for further information.

The reintroduction of fire could also result in an increase in browse and forage for grizzlies. Implementing the actions proposed could result in the temporary displace of individual animals. Chainsaw and helicopter use could in the short term be a negative impact to grizzlies while project is being implemented. Continued management activities could displace wildlife over the term of the project, if stand maintenance is required, additional displacement could occur. Overall the proposed activities would have a short term adverse effect with a long term beneficial effect. Please refer to the wildlife, fisheries, and botany section of this document for me information.



**Figure 5 – Storm approaching the Buckhorn IRA**



No impacts are expected to occur to the Natural quality of the adjacent roadless expanse as a result of the elements of the proposed action.

### **Undeveloped**

Impacts to the undeveloped character of the IRA could include evidence of human habitation in the form of chainsaw use (cut stumps) and evidence of prescribed fire activities. The linear recreational trails found within the area could act as a fire line and result in a linear edge to a burned area. These impacts would occur only as long as the burned area was noticeable and should rehab the following spring when green low growing vegetation returns. The undeveloped character of the area could be altered to a greater degree if a large scale fire were to occur due to unnatural fuel loading and previous suppression tactics. Visible signs of the burning activities would be seen from portion of the adjacent unroaded expanse.

### **Solitude and Primitive Recreation**

Impacts include the short term loss of opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreational experiences. During project implementation temporary trail closures and the use of chainsaws could contribute to loss of a feeling of solitude. These short term impacts may be outweighed by the long term benefits associated with a reduced risk of catastrophic stand replacing fire caused by excessive fuel loading due to past suppression activities.

If a large scale high intensity wildfire fire were to occur in one of the IRAs the loss of solitude and primitive recreational opportunities may occur for a longer period of time due to unsafe post fire trail conditions and prolonged closures needed for the public safety. The proposed trail work on the Goat Mountain Trail (#44) would include brushing, clearing, and repair of the existing tread. This element of the proposed action would have a direct benefit to the recreational access into the Buckhorn Ridge IRA.

Within the adjacent roadless expanse, the temporary displacement of recreational visitor (due to trail closures) may increase visitation. Also, the sounds of chainsaw and helicopter use may distract from a feeling of solitude. These impacts would be a lesser degree than those occurring within the IRA.

### **Special Features**

The proposed actions would have no effect on Special Features found within the IRA. No impact would occur to the adjacent roadless expanse.

### **Manageability**

Actions proposed in this project under the proposed alternative would not degrade the Buckhorn IRA's suitability as wildness. The surrounding roadless expanse would continue to be managed as prescribed by the applicable Forest Plan.

| <b>Resource Element</b>  | <b>Resource Indicator</b> | <b><u>Measure</u><br/>Improving, Stable or<br/>Degrading)</b> | <b>Key Issue</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| Wilderness<br>Attributes | Natural                   | Overall Improving   | Yes              |
|                          | Undeveloped               | Overall Improving   | Yes              |

|  |                                     |        |           |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------|-----------|
|  | Primitive and Unconfined Recreation | Stable | Yes       |
|  | Special Features                    | Stable | No        |
|  | Manageability (as Wilderness)       | Stable | No        |
| <b>Will the alternative affect the areas suitability for wilderness designation?</b> |                                     |        | <b>No</b> |

Table 2 - Resource indicators and measures for alternative 3 (IRAs and Roadless Expanse)

## Cumulative Effects

This section addresses how the proposed alternative would potentially contribute cumulatively with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that may affect the recommended wilderness and inventoried roadless resources in the project area. As mentioned for the cumulative effects analysis for the no-action alternative, the activities and actions most relevant to recreational resource were identified and will now be assessed with activities that are part of the proposed action for possible effects.

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities that may have, or had, the greatest impact on the IRA resource (and adjacent roadless expanse) in the cumulative effects area includes prescribed burns, tree planting, timber stand improvement, wildfire, fire suppression and ongoing trail maintenance activities.

Table 5. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions on NFS in Project Area (Alt. 2, 3 &amp;4)

| <b>Actions on National Forest Lands</b>   | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably Foreseeable</b> |
|---|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Prescribed burns:</b> Based on past experience, we expect prescribed burning is taking place now and in the future, on both the Idaho and Montana sides of the IRA.  | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Tree planting</b> Its expected that future tree planting on forest service lands will occur in the future  | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Timber stand improvement</b> activities: Stand improvement activities are actions such as pre-commercial thinning of young tree plantations and pruning of white pine trees to reduce blister rust mortality. These activities have occurred in the past, are currently being proposed and are expected to continue in the future.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Wildfires:</b> Wildfires will continue to ignite within and adjacent to the project area. Thunderstorms can be expected to occur across the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. A majority of documented ignitions since the 1940's are lightning caused within the project area. A total of 1,891 acres have burned from wildfires within the project area since 1988 and 46,183 acres since 1889. | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Fire suppression:</b> Fire suppression will continue because the project area is within the wildland-urban Interface, and is a continuation of current management.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Trail maintenance:</b> Clearing limits and drainage work completed annually.   | X           | X              | X                             |

Table 6. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions on Adjacent Lands (Alt. 2, 3 &amp;4)

| <b>Actions on Adjacent Ownerships</b>  | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably Foreseeable</b> |
|--|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Prescribed burning:</b> Based on past experience, we expect prescribed burning is taking place now and in the future, on both the Idaho and Montana sides of the IRA. | X           | X              | X                             |

| <b>Actions on Adjacent Ownerships</b>  | <b>Past</b> | <b>Present</b> | <b>Reasonably Foreseeable</b> |
|--|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Tree Planting:</b> Its expected that future tree planting on adjacent lands will occur in the future  | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Timber stand improvement activities:</b> Based on current practices, it is reasonable to assume there has been and will be pre-commercial thinning on industrial and other privately held forestland.   | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Wildfires</b> will continue to ignite within and adjacent to the project area. Thunderstorms can be expected to occur across the Bonners Ferry Ranger District. A majority of documented ignitions since the 1940's are lightning caused within the project area. The timing, size, intensity and resource impacts from future wildfires cannot be predicted. | X           | X              | X                             |
| <b>Fire suppression</b> will continue because Idaho Code states that fire is a nuisance and must be suppressed, and this is the direction for adjacent land fire protection.   | X           | X              | X                             |

### **Summary of Effects**

*Within the Buckhorn Ridge (#661) IRA, the proposed prescribed fire units would benefit several of the areas roadless characteristics by reducing the likelihood of a high intensity stand replacing wildfire. Soil, water and air resources along with diverse communities of plants and animals including those that are treated and endangered (T&E) would benefit. The reintroduction of natural appearing low intensity wildfire scars on the landscape would (in the long term) blend with the existing reference landscape and appear primarily natural.*

*In the short term, recreational visitors to the area may be displaced due to impacts from the prescribed fires and the sights and sounds of helicopter and chainsaws use. Cumulative impact (when combined with the proposed action) would include short term minor impacts to the dispersed recreation opportunities within the IRA. None of these impacts would be out of compliance with roadless area laws, regulations, or other forest service guidance.*

*Within the adjacent roadless expanse, the proposed activities would, to a much lesser degree, reduce a potential for a large scale fire. A slight increase in recreation traffic may occur. The sights and sounds of distant helicopter and far-off chainsaw use could temporally detract from a feeling of solitude and primitive recreational activities.*

**Table 3 - Summary comparison of environmental effects to Wilderness Attributes of the IRA**

| <b>Resource Element</b>  | <b>Indicator/Measure</b>           | <b>Alt 1</b> | <b>Alt 2</b> | <b>Alt 3</b> | <b>Alt 4</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Wilderness Attributes  | Natural:                           | Stable       | Improving    | Improving    | Improving    |
|  | Undeveloped:                       | Stable       | Improving    | Improving    | Improving    |
|  | Solitude and Primitive Recreation: | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       |
|  | Special Features                   | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       |
|  | Manageability                      | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       | Stable       |
| <b>Will the alternative affect the areas suitability for wilderness designation?</b> |                                    | <b>No</b>    | <b>No</b>    | <b>No</b>    | <b>No</b>    |

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